

A NEWSLETTER FOR ALBERTA AGRICULTURE STAFF

# Agknowledge

December, 1992

## Heading off to the retirement pasture

**S**he came to Alberta intending to stay for two years, and in her own words "got detained for another 33".

**Irene Leavitt** left Saskatchewan to become an Alberta Agriculture district home economist in 1958. Currently assistant deputy minister of the field services sector, she will officially retire from the department on January 8, 1993. Her last work day was early this month (October).

Leavitt highlights her 35-year career with Alberta Agriculture as simply liking the people involved with agriculture and being able to stay in close contact with them, even as she moved up the management ranks in the department. The people are also what she'll miss she adds.

The feeling is mutual. "Mrs. Leavitt's dedication and outstanding service to rural Albertans will surely be missed," says deputy minister Ben McEwen. "Irene's leadership skills have been exhibited throughout her career, never more evident than during these last two and one-half years as head of field services."

Leavitt was a district home economist in Claresholm and Calgary between 1958 and 1973. She worked at the regional level for three years



counselling and advising farm families through the federal Small Farm Development Program. Between 1976 and 1987 she headed the home economics and 4-H division. Before becoming assistant deputy minister, she was director of the rural services division from 1987 to early 1990.

Among her many accomplishments are an honorary life membership from the Canadian Society of Extension and a distinguished service award from the Alberta Home Economics Association.

When briefly interviewed, Leavitt said there were "lots of stories" to tell from her years with the department, but declined to share them. Doubtlessly, some of those moments will be told at an official retirement party.

Leavitt's "happy trails" retirement party is planned for the Edmonton Inn on Saturday November 21. The brunch starts with a 10 a.m. reception, followed by a buffet and program. Tickets are \$12.50. Invitations will be circulating throughout the department. More information is available from Betty Atkinson in Edmonton at 427-2440.

## "Helm"smanship recognized

**T**eam work is often mentioned when sports champions are crowned, but the team concept isn't often linked to science awards.

**Jim Helm** did make that link. Helm is a finalist in the 1992 ASTech awards for innovation in Alberta technology. He was nominated for his work for barley and other cereal crop breeding with the Field Crops Development Centre (formerly field crops branch) in Lacombe.

Breeding new crop varieties takes time and teamwork. Helm started the department's cereal grain breeding program when he arrived in Alberta in 1973. Since then, the Lacombe research program has earned an international reputation for its research and its release of eight barley and two triticale varieties.

His nomination wouldn't have been possible without the crop research team he says. That team has 16 scientists and technicians. "Without each other," he says simply, "there's no award."

The ASTechs, established in 1990, recognize and honor individuals, businesses or institutions who have made significant contributions to Alberta's science and technology community. Helm says reaching finalist status is a breakthrough for agriculture as a science.

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Helm has registered two types of barley, Samson and Condor. While both were innovations, he says there is still a long way to go in breeding better varieties. "We've just started. This isn't it, by a long ways," he says.

Raised on a dairy/hay farm in western Washington state, Helm attended Washington State University where he completed bachelor and master degrees in agriculture. His masters thesis involved breeding disease resistance in winter wheat. He took over the barley breeding program when he started his PhD at Oregon State University in 1968.

ASTech awards will be presented in nine categories in Edmonton on October 23. This is during science and technology week in Alberta.

## Promoting food safety

It's a new post for **Tom Sydness**, and an entirely new initiative for Alberta Agriculture.

Sydness, who's been with the department for almost 26 years is the first agri-food safety co-ordinator for Alberta Agriculture's recently launched Agri-Food Safety Initiative.

"Our main objective is to make the province's producers, processors and consumers more aware of the steps they can take to increase food safety," says Sydness.

The department is taking the initiative to prevent problems that could injure Alberta's reputation as having some of the safest food in the world.

"We want the general public to recognize this high quality," says Sydness, whose role will focus on more closely co-ordinating the department's many efforts to promote food safety.

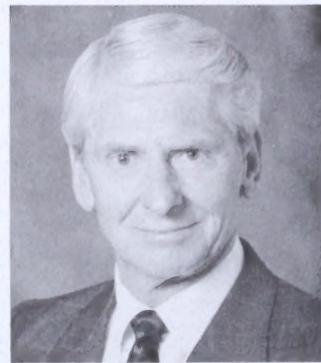
Regional specialists will distribute more information to producers at the farm level regarding the impact of various production practices on the safety of the raw products they produce.

Department processing personnel will work with the processing sector to develop improved quality and safety control programs.

The vast majority of food related incidents can be attributed to improper handling of food after it has left the store. So, home economists will increase their efforts to educate consumers on the proper care of food once it has arrived in the home.

"Food safety is an emerging issue that's growing as people become more health conscious," says Sydness. "It is the department's effort to keep up with the changing times."

## Deputy Minister's Column



In the June and August issues of *Agknowledge* you read about Creating Tomorrow, a public consultation on the future of Alberta's agriculture and food industry. I am fully committed to the development of a shared vision and economic strategy for our great industry and devote this column to an update on the process.

Since our last report, a number of department staff have devoted countless hours to helping community leaders organize consultation meetings around the province. To each of you, **Mr. Isley, Mrs. McClellan** and I extend our thanks for a job well done.

The consultations centre on the draft vision, Creating Tomorrow and the meetings to date have been very rewarding.

Eleven additional meetings are scheduled from mid-October to Mid-November. The places and dates are somewhat different than previously reported in *Agknowledge* and are as follows:

Vulcan	October 15
Bow Island	October 20
Olds	October 22
Wainwright	October 28
Glendon	October 30
Barrhead	November 2
Fairview	November 4
Ft. Vermilion	November 6
Edmonton	November 9
Hanna	November 10
Calgary	November 13

Our staff in and around these locations are shouldering the work required to organize these meetings. Although we are limiting department attendance, each and every one of you can lend a hand in making the meetings successful. How? By learning about the Creating Tomorrow process and its objectives, discussing them with farmers, farm families and food processors and by encouraging their attendance at one of the meetings.

A shared industry vision and goals can only be achieved if stakeholders from every link in the food chain are involved in the process. Your word-of-mouth can help bring about that mix. As an informed and enthusiastic promoter of Creating Tomorrow, you will be doing your part in making this consultation the most successful ever undertaken by the department.

The consultations will culminate with a Ministers' Conference on the Agriculture and Food Economy scheduled for early January, 1993. At this conference, the vision will be finalized along with strategies to pursue in attaining the desired future of our industry. Creating Tomorrow will be presented as an integral part of our government's Toward 2000 Together initiative.

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I count on your support as together we move toward 2000 and beyond.

**Editors note:** For information on a specific consultation meeting, phone the DA and DHE at that meeting location. Call Bonnyville or St. Paul for information on Glendon. For information on the overall consultation process or for a copy of the discussion document entitled 'Creating Tomorrow', call **Barb Strob** or **Evelyn Shapka** at the planning secretariat in Edmonton: 427-2417, RITE: 147-2417.

## Poultry puzzler

**T**ed and Alice invite Bob and Carol over for supper. Ted prepares his favourite chicken dish. During supper, Alice comments on the dark colour of the bones after the meat has been removed from the drumsticks. This leads to a discussion.

Alice is sure that the reason for the discolouration is because the chicken was not properly bled when it was slaughtered. Bob recalls reading something about gas ovens causing this problem. Carol suspects that the bones turned dark because the chicken had been frozen. Ted visited a poultry slaughter plant once and suggests that it may have something to do with stunning the bird for too long before bleeding it.

Who is correct?

### ANSWER:

They're all wrong. This is very common with immature poultry and indicates very rapid growth. Gas ovens can make poultry appear pink and undercooked. That is probably what Bob recalled reading.

Thanks goes out to the folks in the meat hygiene branch for this titbit of information found in the "Focus on Animal Health" newsletter, September 1992 issue.

## Of social direction

**I**n the Deputy Minister's column last month, Mr. McEwen mentioned the rejuvenation of the department's social committee. This has led to many fun and exciting events taking place the past year.

Since a successful halloween, planned by rural services, the department has enjoyed: a children's Christmas party, planned by financial services and assisted by plant industry; trade policy secretariat organized an adult Christmas party; plenty of cheer was spread by processing services through a Christmas reception; a successful

golf tournament/camping weekend was a result of the efforts of economic services/animal industry; animal industry organized the summer slowpitch league and tournament; the fall barbecue and corn roast was organized by conservation and development, together with the Alberta Tree Nursery; and recently, personnel planned a successful blood donor challenge. As well, marketing services and the library have both contributed to the social committee through their fund raising efforts.

"Thanks to all the support of the organizers of events this past year," says outgoing Chairman **Barry Mehr**. "Special thanks to each of you who have organized or participated in organizing events that have contributed towards what I thought was a 'fun' year," he says.

The following events are scheduled to take place: Halloween, with information services as planners; a raquetball and squash tournament arranged by Planning and Development; a children's Christmas party planned by plant industry and financial services; an adult Christmas party, scheduled for December 11 at the Sunridge Ski Lodge, planned by the executive office and assisted by the farmers' advocate office; the research division will be hosting the Christmas reception; and for those of you dreaming of next season's green fairways, the golf tournament will be planned through economic services and processing services.

It is also encouraging to see that the financial position of the social committee has improved. Currently the committee for fall 1992 has \$1,336.48 in its bank account. "A special thanks to **Iris Plamondon**, who has been serving as treasurer of the social committee, and has graciously agreed to continue," says Mehr.

"Our social committee is important to all of us. My thanks for all the support from each and every one of you over the last year. As we all benefit in many different ways, I know that you will be extending similar support to our new chairman, **Doug Radke**," concludes Mehr.

## From Region to Region



## The pros and cons of grammatical software packages

**S**ome grammatical software packages on the market claim to be able to catch "every detectable error" (manual for **Correct Grammar**). That may be, but we need to pay some attention to the "undetectable errors": illogical organization, failure to respond to audience needs or lack of flow. A good readability score (grade eight to 10) does not guarantee that writing is in plain language.

Despite their shortcomings, these software packages are still useful in catching common errors in grammar and composition. Programs like **GRAMMATIK 5**, recommended by the Plain Language Co-ordinating Committee, work along the same lines

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(See photo on page 4)



Events like September's blood donor clinic at the J.G. O'Donoghue Building have been successful due to the energy and support from our social committee.

#### Plain language please, cont'd . . .

as spell-check. They spot potential errors and give the writer a series of options. The program can be customized to override or mark specific errors or words.

So use the software with discretion. And share your work with your colleagues. No computer program can replace their good judgement.

**GRAMMATIK 5** is on standing offer for about \$65. To find out more, please call **Terry Lister** in Systems at 427-2101.

## United Way Launch

United Way volunteer canvassers kicked off the 1992 United Way Campaign on September 30, as they travelled through the atrium to the tune of pipers.

Special thanks goes out to those pipers, who are **Anne Bennett**, agricultural and community services branch, **Mel Miller**, head of resource planning, and the drummer Glen, Anne's son.

Each canvasser was presented with a gold United Way lapel pin by **Don Macyk**, plant industry director, acting on behalf of our deputy minister **Ben McEwen**. Don expressed his support in a brief speech and helped set up the main campaign thermometer with **Dr. Ralph Shute**, United Way Chairman.

"Alberta Agriculture's target for 1992 is \$48,000, up from the previous year's goal of \$42,000," says Shute. "In 1991 department personnel donated \$43,224, earning a silver recognition award." This award was presented by Barney Stevens, United Way representative, who currently works with the Edmonton Police Force in the identification section.

"The continued growth in preferred giving and the increasing support by payroll deductions, makes the 1992 goal of \$48,000 well within reach," expresses Shute.

This year's campaign committee members are:

**Ralph Shute**, Chairman (health management branch - 422-4844), **Mahlon Weir**, Vice-Chair/Secretary (4-H branch - 422-4444),

**Delilah Reeves**, Treasurer (animal health division - 422-4830),

**Emily Samoil**, Assistant Treasurer (research division - 427-1956),

**JoAnne McCormack**, Canvassing Co-ordinator (personnel division - 427-2111),

**Gail Dzienewka**, Publicity Co-ordinator (statistics branch - 427-4011),

**Kim Whitehead**, Past Chair (central milk testing lab - 422-1892).

"With the enthusiasm expressed by these volunteers, we look forward to going over the top again," says Shute.

## On the move...

Welcome to the following people who have recently joined Alberta Agriculture: **Beverly Davison** and **Diane Boyd**.

#### Transfers:

**Yvonne Grabowsky**, is the Peace Region's new regional director; former head of the Airdrie laboratory **Dr. Norman Lowes** has moved to Edmonton to join the animal health lab; taking on the new post as provincial co-ordinator of the Farm Business Management Initiative program is **Anita Lunden**; transferring from Smoky Lake to work as the district home economist in Foremost/ Bow Island is **Jackie (Popko) McKnight**; heading to Olds is print media and *Agknowledge*'s own **Tracey Munro**, to join the farm business management branch; **Larry Ruud** is the new provincial grains and oilseed analyst with market analysis, transferring from planning secretariat; **Randi Sandbu** has left her regional post in Barrhead for a six month developmental assignment with marketing services; moving upstairs to finance from systems is **Eric Winterburn**; and **Peter Woloshyn** has moved from the production economics branch, to join statistics as a senior statistician.

Our condolences go out to the family of colleague **Eric Horton**, formerly the regional director in Region I, who passed away on August 31, 1992. Eric was with Alberta Agriculture for 15 years.

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